

## **JESUS ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE SHAMED—FOR OUR SAKE**

A short story. Many years ago I read a little story entitled, The Look. It was set in early twentieth century France, a mansion with large rooms and doors, with locks, and keyholes for the locks. The story was of a man who decided to spy on what was going on in the master bedroom by looking through the keyhole without being observed. He wanted to be able to look but without anyone seeing him. Secret. While he is looking through the keyhole he suddenly realizes that he is not alone. Someone else is nearby, looking at him as he is looking at them. He had been spying on others; now another is spying on him. Suddenly he feels deep shame. He is caught in his transgression. Caught in his sin. Shame flushes over his whole body. Shame does that. We have all felt shame.

Another story. Before Pope Saint John XXIII was pope he was the Cardinal Patriarch of the Archdiocese of Venice in Italy. His name was Angelo Cardinal Roncalli. He was known for his kindness. One day one of the priests of the diocese was reported to Cardinal Roncalli. The priest had been seen leaving a house of prostitution. Roncalli went to the place and waited outside. When the priest emerged there was his bishop. The priest was told to get into the car. The priest was so embarrassed, so covered with shame. He hung his head. The Cardinal drove him back to his residence, taking him inside. Once inside, the Cardinal knelt before the priest, and asked the priest to hear his confession. When the priest had finished giving absolution to the Cardinal, the Cardinal said to him, "Father, the Lord Jesus loves you very much. He has called you to be one of his priests, to bring his forgiveness to those who have sinned. You have just done so. Do not ever forget who you are and the great calling you have been given. Now go and do not commit this sin again."

The woman caught in the act of adultery is made to stand before Jesus. She is publicly being shamed. No one cares about her. She is just someone to be used to get at Jesus and to tear him down. She is an adulterous. She has been unfaithful to her marriage vows. A terrible thing. Something that can destroy a marriage because it destroys trust. A very serious sin in every age. Enough to have its own commandment prohibiting it. How will Jesus, who has come from God—who gave the Ten Commandments—deal with this situation and this woman. The men already have stones in their hands. If Jesus sides with what Moses taught then the stones will fly, she will die, and Jesus, the kind Son of God, will lose his followers.

On the other hand, if Jesus dismisses her sin then he will be accused of disobeying the Commandments. Either way, he loses. But Jesus is so much more than his accusers think him to be. He is masterful in bending down and writing on the ground. He touches the earth. In doing so, he transforms the earth where they stand. IN that very moment he renews the face of the earth. He does? How? By forgiveness. AND by not shaming her even though she had sinned. Shame is a human phenomenon. But God does not shame us. No. God forgives us. The man caught looking experiences deep shame. The priest caught lusting experiences deep shame. In each person the shame arises from within themselves as they experience being caught. But the

priest, through forgiveness, is freed from his shame. And this woman caught in adultery, by forgiveness, is freed from her shame.

My friends, Jesus does not shame us for our sins, including our sexual sins. He offers us forgiveness. He sets us free from that which moves us to sin in this way. But Jesus does not shame us. As a matter of fact, Jesus allows himself to be stripped, nailed and raised high for the world to see. He allows himself to be exposed—shamed—for our sake. He takes on our shame in that moment and frees us from our shame. Right there. He looks upon his executioners and the jeering crowd and he says: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” I have prayed this passage often. Recently a second comment—not in Scripture—occurred to me. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And. Father, forgive them FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT I AM DOING.” No we do not. But he is looking at us in such a way that we can realize we are loved. And not look at us in a way that shames us. And that sets us free.

So. How do you look at people? At those around you caught in their sin? Do you shame them? At yourself, when you are honest in admitting your own sin, do you shame yourself? My friends, there is another way. It is to look at love—at that sinner, those sinners, and the sinner you are yourself. Look at each person with as much love as you can. It will change the world. It has changed the world. When I raise the Host at the consecration today, realize that I hold high the Lord of Life who looks out upon you, even in your sins, with his gracious love.

May He bless us today and give us his peace.